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2 Questions —McNamara And Viet GIs

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WASHINGTON.

Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara indicated yesterday that the Administration has virtually abandoned its goal of withdrawing most of the American military personnel from South Viet Nam by the end of 1965.

Mr. McNamara's remarks, made at a Pentagon press conference, might well increase the importance of United States involvement in Viet Nam as a political issue in the election campaign.

The Johnson administration had been under attack from some Democrats for playing too great a part in Viet Nam. Some Republicans charge that present policy is so half-hearted that nothing is accomplished.

At the same time, the Defense Secretary adroitly avoided an opportunity to rule himself out as a possible Democratic candidate for Vice-President. He also declined to confirm his previous identification as a Republican.

When asked about the earlier Administration hope of bringing home most of the approximately 16,000 service men from Viet Nam by the end of 1965, Mr. McNamara said:

"I continue to believe we should not leave an American in South Viet Nam longer than necessary to train a Vietnamese counterpart . . . We have brought back a thousand already. I am hoping that certain missions will be completed this year and additional U. S. personnel will be brought back. At the same time, we are sending over U. S. personnel for new training missions not previously carried on."

"So there will be an interchange. There will be reductions and additions going on concurrently. I don't want to predict what the totals will be at the end of this year or at the end of 1965."

Last October, after returning from a trip to Viet Nam, Mr. McNamara and Gen. Maxwell Taylor, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the National Security Council that substantial withdrawal would probably be feasible by the end of 1965. Their report, made before the first of two coups in Saigon, was adopted as official policy.

As recently as last March 5, just before his last trip to Viet Nam, Mr. McNamara discussed the same question at some length, emphasizing both American determination to give the Vietnamese all the help they need and the intention to withdraw Americans as the training missions were concluded. At that time he made no reference to "new training missions not previously carried on."

Instead, he commented during the March 5 press conference: "I think that you should expect us, I think the American people should expect us, to conclude a training mission after a reasonable length of time. . . . There are, of course, certain numbers of our personnel, relatively small in numbers or in terms of percentage of the total, . . . which we will probably retain in Viet Nam indefinitely."

At the time of the October statement, many observers felt the White House was being overly optimistic—in public—to quiet growing skepticism here about the cost and outcome of the war. The military situation in South Viet Nam has admittedly deteriorated since October, largely because of the two political upsets and the confusion that resulted from them.

Yesterday Mr. McNamara reviewed the state of the anti-guerilla effort with considerable caution. He again praised Vietnamese Premier Gen. Nguyen Khanh, but said it would be "several months before we see any substantial progress."

Without going into details, he said he expected some help from other members of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. Presently seven American allies are giving limited aid to South Viet Nam. These are Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Canada, Australia and New

Zealand. With the exception of Australia and Britain, which maintain small military training missions, this aid is in the economic, technical and cultural fields. Between 1959 and 1963, the economic aid amounted to about \$93 million in loans and grants—only a tiny fraction of the American effort.

In the Senate, meanwhile, Sen. Wayne Morse, D., Ore., renewed his attack on the U. S. role in South Viet Nam. He said it was "illegal" under the constitution, the United Nations Charter and the Geneva agreement of 1954. In the past Sen. Morse has called the conflict "McNamara's war."

"I have a high regard for Sen. Morse," Mr. McNamara replied, but not in this respect. . . . I must say I don't object to its being called McNamara's war. I think it is a very important war and I am pleased to be identified with it and to do whatever I can to win it."

When asked about Vice-Presidential talk, Mr. McNamara said President Johnson had not discussed anything with him besides continuing as Defense Secretary. "It would be presumptuous of me to speculate on what, if anything, he would ever ask me to do other than serve as Secretary of Defense," he added.

Mr. McNamara was in unusually good humor yesterday and displayed the kind of wit that does no harm to a candidate. He started out by saying: "I am sorry that I don't have a rose garden to receive you in"—a reference to the locale of President Johnson's press conference on Thursday.

When asked about his party affiliation, Mr. McNamara restated the question this way: "am I now or was I ever a card-carrying Republican or Democrat?"

He went on to give a non-answer. He said voter registration in Michigan, his last state of residence, did not require a statement of party preference. He declined to say how he was enrolled earlier when he lived in California. Until he joined the Kennedy administration, he was regarded as an independent Republican, but one not closely identified with party activity.